Effectively Tapping into Local, County, State Historical Societies and Libraries

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Course Description

City, county, state historical societies and libraries are a wealth of knowledge, artifacts, and resources ready to assist in finding your roots. Learn the ins and outs of working with historical societies and how they can extend your research success.
Invitation

- Open your mind to ideas.
- Choose what you need.
- Use what you take.
- Share what you learn.
**Request Companion Article**

**Article Description:** 60-plus pages with index and links

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**Subject line:** “Historical Society”
Presentation Overview

- Define Historical Societies and libraries/archives.
- Outline strategy for using the historical societies and libraries.
- Devine the vast array of resources.
- Organizing your research priorities.
Personal Experience: Interwoven Historical and Genealogical Resources

Focused early research on records available
- On-line
- Microfilm
- Family History Library in Salt Lake City

- 10-day trip ended up being a month-long discovery of
- Who I am
- Where I came from
- Whose I am
Personal Experience: Interwoven Historical and Genealogical Resources

By the end of my trip I had

- Traveled 2,500 miles
- Taken 12,000 digital images
- Identified 150,000 plus ancestors from direct and collateral lines
- Visited and researched
- University archives
- Special collections
- Public and regional libraries
- State, regional, local historical and ethnic societies
- State, county, and local government agencies
- Spoken and counseled extensively with subject matter experts
Personal Experience: Interwoven Historical and Genealogical Resources

- Federal, State, and Local Government
- State, County, Local, and Ethnic Historical Societies
- Regional and Community Public Libraries
- Extensively with subject matter experts
- Walked the land of my family
- Visited the graves and cemeteries of my family
- Found records
- Met cousins both of Anglo- and African-American descent
Personal Experience: Interwoven Historical Resources

Interwoven historical and genealogical resources that were dedicated to the collection, preservation, and interpretation of artifacts and documents. They included:

- Historical Societies
- College and University Archives and Special Collections
- Corporate Archives
Mission and Roles of Historical Societies and Libraries
The mission of historical societies is to nurture and promote awareness and appreciation of state, regional, and local history and culture through the identification, collection, study, and preservation of the materials (i.e., common, rare, and unique) that include printed, manuscript, map, and photographic collections which are made available to the public, researchers, and genealogists.
Mission and Role of Historical Societies

Many historical societies make these collections available through on-site, on-line and inter-library loan resources. The types of services historical societies provide include:

- Public lectures
- Seminars
- Conferences
- Consulting services
- Arrange school and general group tours
- Support scholarly research
- Maintain museums of changing, permanent, and traveling exhibitions
- Operate a research library
- Publish books, magazines, and newsletters
Other Types of Societies

Lineage/Hereditary Societies. A lineage society is an organization whose membership is limited to persons who can prove lineal, documented, descent from a qualifying ancestor.
Other Types of Societies

Immigrant and Early Settler Societies. Dozens of societies have been established focusing on specific immigrant groups, or early settlers of some locality.
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Other Types of Societies

European Ancestry Societies. Some lineage societies focus on ancestors who were notable long before the American colonies were established.
Other Types of Societies

Nationality or Ethnic Lineage Societies. These are societies that focus on an entire ethnic group.
Other Types of Societies

Special Interests Societies.
These societies focus on research and archives focusing on specific areas of interest where generally large groups of individuals have interest.
The Mission and Role of University, State Library Archives and Special Collections

The mission of library archives and special collections is to grow, organize, care for, and manage collections of records that are of local, regional, state and national interest - many of which date back to the early colonial period. They are responsible for those items that are especially rare and unique in the library's collections, including rare books, broadsides, sheet music, photographic images and fine art. These collections are made available to researchers from across the country and the world through on-site, on-line and inter-library loan.
The Mission and Role of University, State Library Archives and Special Collections

In addition to managing and preserving its collections, the libraries provide

- Research and reference assistance
- Consulting services
- Administers numerous federal, state, and local grant programs
- Publishes books, magazines, and newsletters
- Offers the public exhibitions, lectures, and other educational programs
Available Resources: Collections

Available Resources: Collection
Items that are secured and managed are very specific to a community, county, region, and state.

While some items may be duplicated across collections, many items are unique and can only be found in specific locations. It then becomes very important that you gain a comprehensive understanding of all the resources that are available to you collectively.
Available Resources
Available Resources: Audio-Visual

- Speeches
- Sporting events
- Interviews
- Newscasts
- Performances they document
Available Resources: Audio

- Recordings
- Wax cylinder recordings
- Recordable disk records
- Recording wire
- Open reel-to-reel
- Cassettes
- Digital disks

*Many of these recordings have been digitized and available for review.

**Subject matter ranges from music to speeches/presentations.
Available Resources: Bible Records

Usually located in manuscript collections Includes:

- Birth
- Marriage
- Death records

*Most have information not recorded elsewhere.*
Available Resources: Cemetary Records

- Tombstone inscriptions
- Birth and death
- Maiden names of women
- Family relationships
Available Resources: Census Records

- Federal census
- Agriculture & manufacturing schedules
- Mortality schedules
- Social statistics schedules
- Slave schedules
- 1890 Special census of union civil war veterans and their widows
Available Resources: Church Records

- Determine birth and death dates in the years before states started to keep vital records.
- Most churches keep their own records.
- Libraries usually have a number of books, copies of church records, a few manuscript volumes of original records, and microfilmed church records.
- Usually available on microfilm.
Available Resources: Civil Vital Records (Birth, Death, Marriage, Divorce)

Each state has the equivalent of a bureau of vital records
- Bureau of Vital Statistics
- Division of Records and Statistics
- Division of Public Health
- Vital Records Division
Available Resources: Diaries and Journals

- Autobiographies of ordinary people like your ancestors.

- Along with genealogical data, diaries give a wonderful glimpse into someone's daily life, thoughts, and attitudes.

- A diarist may also record feelings on national events, such as a war or its impact on family, and the community.
Available Resources: Directories

Directories and member lists are the predecessors of the modern-day phone book.

Alumni Directory. Alumni directories contain a listing of individuals who attended a particular university, the year that they graduated, and their degree.

Business Directory. Business directories usually contain information such as dates and places of birth, dates of marriage, names of children, length of residence in the town, and other valuable information.
Available Resources: Directories

Professional Directories. Include directories for people such as doctors and lawyers.

City Directory. City directories help locate where and when a person lived. A city directory can guide one to other records such as censuses, death and probate records, naturalization records, land records, and church records.

Telephone Directory. Most people are familiar with the common telephone directory; they contain addresses and phone numbers. These directories can be quite helpful in locating living relatives or possible relatives.
Available Resources: Electronic Recordings

Although the majority of archival materials are still paper-based, the amount of electronic records entering archives is increasing.

- e-mail
- Databases
- Text documents
- Spreadsheets
- Digital images
- Web pages
Available Resources: Ephemera

Ephemera are materials created for a specific, temporary purpose.
Available Resources: Genealogical Notes

Some researchers have donated research notes to libraries, which are often cataloged with Manuscript Collections.
Available Resources: Immigration Records

There were three steps to the naturalization process:

- Declarations of Intention (or First Papers)
- Petition (Second or Final Papers)
- Certificates of Naturalization
- Certificate of Citizenship
- Oath of Allegiance
Available Resources: Land Records

- Tax Records
- Deeds
- Bounty-land Records
- Homestead Records
Available Resources: Local and Family Histories

- Family History
- Local History
- Biography
- Institutional Histories

**Important: Look in the Notes**
Family and personal histories will provide clear documentation for statements made. Footnotes and bibliographies can provide key data if one engages in a process known as citation analysis.
Available Resources: Maps & Gazetteers
Available Resources: Memorabilia

Memorabilia are objects containing historical value that do not fit into any of the standard categories of special collections.

Memorabilia collections frequently include
- Badges
- Plaques
- Paintings
- Trophies
- Coins
Available Resources: Military Records

Military records kept by the U.S. Government about soldiers and sailors who served their country are a major source of information about individuals.

The four major wars of interest to genealogists:

- **American Revolution (1775-1783)**
  Approximately one out of every seven Americans fought in the American Revolution.
Available Resources: Military Records

- **Civil War (1861-1865)**
  Approximately one out of every ten Americans fought in the Civil War.

- **World War I (1918-1919)**
  Over 4.8 million served in World War I

- **World War II (1942-1945)**
  Over 16 million served in World War II.

**Types of Records**
- Draft Records
- Registration Cards
- Service Records
Available Resources: Newspapers

Newspapers can contain a multitude of genealogical information:

- Obituaries
- Births
- Marriages
- Deaths
- Legal notices
- Estate transaction
- Biographies
- Military
- Immigration
Available Resources: Periodicals

Genealogical Society Publications
Publish journals
Newsletters
Quarterlies

Value:
Reveal genealogical sources and resources in specific geographic areas.

- Index and abstracting source materials.

- Provide ancestor charts and group sheets of members.

- Lists of upcoming seminars significant to family historians.

- And more....
Historical Society Publications

- Help to set research in the proper historical context.

- Useful for citation analysis (e.g., to construct the widest possible data pool in which to look for ancestors).

- Provide in-depth provides of individuals, communities, etc. to which our ancestor belonged.

- They contain such items as genealogies, transcripts and abstracts of local records, probate records, church records, and cemetery records.

- And more....
Available Resources: Oral Histories

Oral histories are a recording of people's memories. It is the living history of everyone's unique life experiences.
Available Resources: Photo Collections

Photograph archives consist of collections and can range from a few to several million images.

Depending on the collection, images will date back to the 1860’s and track the expansion of the community, county, region, and state.
Available Resources: Probate Records

Probate Records are generated by county courts.

Societies and libraries will have probate records for some counties; others can be obtained by contacting the county clerk in the county where the will was probated.
Available Resources: Rare Books

Although a common misconception holds that rare books are always old and that scarce books are always rare, there are in fact many factors that contribute to a book's rarity. In the broadest sense, a book is rare if its demand exceeds its supply.
Available Resources: Reference Guides/Brochures/Leaflets

Many state organizations provide reference guides, brochures or leaflets in print and on-line that discuss specific aspects of their collections and how to use or how to conduct research in a particular state, region, or local. Look for guides such as:

- A Guide to Genealogical Research at the (State) Historical Society
- Population Census Records at the (State) Historical Society
- Index to Naturalizations in (State)
- List of Basic Sources on (State) History
Available Resources: Scrapbooks

The scrapbook is one of the few types of archival materials created for the purpose of preserving the memory of an individual, organization, or event.

- Photographs
- Newspaper clippings
- Annotations
Available Resources: Subject Based Collections

Subject-based collections attempt to collect exhaustively in their subject area and will often include primary source material in the form of official documents and archival and manuscript materials that has been published for wider dissemination.
Records to Search: Township, City, County, and State Histories and Biographies

1. Local, county, and state histories detail the events that occurred and the people who played a part.
Strategy for Searching Societies and Libraries
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Step 1. Consult Handbooks on Genealogical Research
Handbooks on genealogical research offer instruction, advice, and information useful to both beginning and advanced genealogists.

Step 2. Check Genealogy Surname Card Files
This physical and/or online card file is arranged alphabetically by surname and contains references to births, baptisms, marriages, and deaths.
Strategy for Searching Societies and Libraries

Step 3. Search Family History Files and Published Biographies and Genealogies.
The Family History Files contain unpublished notes and charts on lineages specific to the state, region, local and compiled by other genealogists.

Step 4. Check Books on State and Local History
A wealth of genealogical information is contained in books on state and local history.
Strategy for Searching Societies and Libraries

Step 5. Search Journals and Periodicals
Bits and pieces of family history can be found in articles in historical and genealogical journals.

Step 6. Search Original Source Material
Collections include books, manuscripts, reference files, maps, newspapers, and photographs on all aspects of history and people.
Strategy for Searching Societies and Libraries

Step 7. Research Other Libraries
Become aware of all the resources in the state, regional, and local area that might have collections to research.

Step 8. Make Your Research Available to Others
Societies and libraries are glad to accept gifts of published books as well as notes and charts relating to research on families from their local.
Organizing your Research Priorities
What Research Can You Do From Home?

- Before you travel hundreds if not thousands of miles to find the library or archive in the home of your ancestors, make sure the records you seek aren’t as close as your computer or down the street at your local library.
Review Your Records Before You Go On Your Trip

- Review every printout, photocopy, note and Internet record.

- Know what you have and don't have and make a to-do list of what to find.

- The basic genealogical advice, to work from what you know to what you don't know, applies.

- Please do not take your entire notebook, take notes and/or your laptop.
What Kind of Records Can’t be Found at Home?

A fellow genealogist had been hunting for a particular ancestor for 28 years.

All that he knew about the person is that he might have worked aboard ships as a young man.

Prior to his trip he became aware of the Mariner Library.

While at the library he found a written letter, meal lists from the 1850’s and a myriad of other documents that related to his family.
Questions to Ask That Can Yield Treasures

Make sure you ask your libraries, archivists, and clerks questions such as:

- What indexes, collections are unique to your facility?

- Do you have card files, newspapers, original records, computer databases, networks, or compact discs that can only be searched at your repository?

- Have your records been microfilmed, if yes, where else are they located?

- What if any of your collections are accessible on-line?

- Does it have records such as church records that have not been microfilmed?
Determine What Resources Are Available in that Area

- Do research to determine the places that have information or materials you can use.
- Resources can include libraries, archives, genealogical societies, historical societies, courthouses, vital record offices, churches, funeral homes, chambers of commerce, cemeteries, schools, and fraternal organizations.
- Frequently, genealogists ignore regional archives or regional libraries that may contain useful records.
Determine What Type of Information You Seek

- Do research to determine the places that have information or materials you can use.
- You need to be 100% clear of what you are looking for.
- Do your homework before leaving so you know where you want to go and what you want to look at when you get there.
Make Advance Contact—Establish a Rapport

- Make the effort to contact each source directly by mail, telephone, and/or email.

- You will save yourself many hours by making advance contacts.

- Let them know what you are seeking, and try to establish a rapport.
When Possible, Let People Know You are Coming and When

- Let people know you’re coming and when.

- Make sure the people you need to see will be there. Be willing to rearrange your schedule to be at a library when the prime resource will be there.

- Remember to confirm your appointment or just give a courtesy call to let them know you are excited to come.
Know the Times of Operation

- Remember to contact county courthouses, libraries, and other record repositories you plan to visit to determine their office hours.

- There's nothing more frustrating than getting to a destination and finding it closed for whatever reason.
Be Patient When Requesting Records

- If you are planning to receive specific records before you leave for your trip, give yourself at least a 4 month window.

- Why? Many libraries/archives have more requests than staff can manage.
Plan to Visit the Library/Archive

- Check to see if the library has an internet site. Most library internet sites provide basic information associated with hours of operation.

- Larger libraries, like the Library of Virginia, and state/country archives have an online catalog.

- Search the catalog before you go.
Where is the Best Place to Get Information?

- The same records are often available in different locations.
- Make sure you ask the cost of acquiring such records.

On a recent trip I found that a marriage record from the early 1800’s would cost me $10.00 at the university library. The same information was available at the state archive for the cost of a photocopy.
Anyone who has done research in Salt Lake City at the Family History Library will find foreign record offices quite a bit different.

You can cover a lot of territory in a few days, especially since it is open Monday-Saturday.
Conducting Research During Your Genealogy Trip
Keep a Travel Journal During Your Trip

- Take time at the end or beginning of each day to write in your travel journal.

- After returning home, your journal will be an important asset for further researching and documenting the value of your trip.

- After just one week on the road, one day blends into the next.
Keep a Travel Journal During Your Trip

For example, after I have entered a library, I will write details about:

- Who I spoke with and their role in the library, address, email, phone number, etc.
- All discussions no matter with whom and information exchanged.
- The records I looked at and why.
- What I found and decisions I made during my search.
- All new information carefully documenting all associated information.
- Thoughts and questions that cross my mind during the research.
Learn about Local History

Your ancestors were people with dreams, opportunities, frustrations, disappointments, bills, sickness and death.

Learn about the history of the area from which your ancestors came.

- What did they eat?
- Where would they have gone to church, where is the mill they took their crops to?
- What sort of natural features did they encounter when farming the land?
- What is the city most famous for?
Searching for Your Ancestors
Original Places of Residence

- Like many of our ancestors, they came from tiny villages.

- When they immigrated they may say they were from the largest nearby town or city.

- Records such as your birth records and land records can help you locate where your family lived by giving you a street address or land upon which they lived.

- With such information in hand you can ask directions from locals.
Searching Libraries and Archives in Country

When you’re doing in-country research, expect the unexpected. Some experiences are as follows:

- Record offices will have government hours (perhaps closing for lunch).
- You may need advance reservations.
- You may need to look up your resources in a catalog and write them on a request to submit to the reference librarian.
- Your request may take more than a half-hour to arrive.
- .....and more.
Consider Using Your Camera in Library, Archive, or Museum Research

- Consider using your digital camera as a tool for documenting and capturing information found in your research.

- If you have never used your camera in library research, practice in your local library under all types of conditions include very low light. The time to learn isn't at a library 2,000 miles from home.
Photographing in Libraries

- Know the policy about digital photography before you go.
- Do not use flash.
- Set up photo stand or tripod.
- You may need to sign an intended uses statement.
- Their staff may need to handle rare objects.
- Only take photos of intended artifacts.
Photographing in Museums and Archives

- Check first to see if photography is allowed.
- Objects covered with glass or plastic are best shot at angle.
- Snap a separate picture of a caption or a label of the exhibit.
- Use the tripod along with your camera’s self-timer night/lowlight setting.
- No tripod? Then brace yourself.
Photographing Microfilm

- Hold the camera up next to the lens. Or place your camera on a tripod located in front of the reader screen.

- Place a white paper (or other color) on the read surface as the target area for shooting.

- Adjust the camera/tripod position so the information you want to copy fills the LCD frame, not the viewfinder.
Photographing Microfilm

- Focus and or set the macro mode if necessary. This will depend on your camera model and how far away it is from the microfilm reader.

- Make sure the flash is turned off. Set the camera's self-timer if needed.

- Gently press the shutter button halfway to lock the exposure and focus.
Photographing Microfilm

- Press the button completely down. If using the tripod, move away from the camera and wait for the self-timer to trip the shutter.

- Take several shots. Consider using the "best shot selector" and/or auto bracketing your shots if your camera has these features or manual bracketing if it doesn't.

Microfilm image enhanced with placement of color paper on projection surface. Sample colors used from top to bottom are canary, white, pink.
Priorities After Your Genealogy Trip
Steps in Processing, Organizing, and Cataloging Your Information

- Analyze what goals were accomplished and how.
- To whom did you promise correspondence?
- Review your journal writings.
- Revise old data with new findings.
- If you recorded any interviews or thoughts on tape, transcribe and record thoughts.
- Carefully and safely organize documents, copies and your notes.
Steps in Processing, Organizing, and Cataloging Your Information

- Organize photos, postcards, brochures, and pictures.

- Share information. It won’t do any good sitting in your files.

- Share your resources with genealogy societies, newsgroups and message boards.

- In addition to what you learned about family, share what you learned about libraries and archives in the locations you visited.
Questions

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